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Emotional Intelligence in Practice: A Study of Social Work Students

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is crucial in social work, as this profession is often emotionally strenuous and stressful. This research is intended to explore the emotional intelligence levels of social work students. The study involved 250 students in the Master's degree program at the Department of Social Work from various colleges in Coimbatore,Tamil Nadu. The instrument used was the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire developed by Petrides in 2019. The findings indicate that social work students possess high emotional intelligence to take up the role as social workers and thus emotional intelligence plays a role vital in decision-making, taking action, and achieving strong performance in social work.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Social Work, Students, Profession

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a field where skilled professionals are dedicated to assisting those in vulnerable situations and communities to overcome everyday difficulties. Social workers operate in numerous environments, united by their dedication to advocating for and enhancing the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and societies. They frequently face greater burnout rates compared to other healthcare professionals, highlighting the necessity of exploring strategies that allow them to safeguard their well-being. The ability to handle one‘s emotional responses expertly in intricate care environments is the fundamental function of social workers.

Social workers support individuals by implementing direct and indirect interventions that develop, empower, and transform individuals, groups, and communities. They manage social service organisations, oversee programs and staff, and conduct research to aid in various interventions with diverse populations.This profession arises from an integrated approach, as the foundational knowledge related to social work is drawn from various fields, including psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and others.

Social workers frequently encounter the challenging realities of their clients' lives, which are often the result of societal oppressive systems. Differentiating between emotions like empathy, compassion, identification, discomfort, anxiety, and annoyance or indignation can be challenging, and managing them appropriately in a work environment is essential. Nevertheless, emotions are significant as they frequently reflect conscious and unconscious perspectives that can influence practice.

Numerous circumstances can evoke emotions in social work due to the dilemmas it tackles, such as trauma, suffering, violence, abuse, various types of exposure, and vulnerability. Considering the significance of emotions and power dynamics in the social work process and the recent increase in emotional intelligence literature overall, it's clear that a conversation about the possible importance of emotional intelligence in this field is long overdue.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, manage, and control emotions. This ability promotes adaptability and understanding of the importance and consequences of emotions. Emotional intelligence has been the subject of much research since the 1990s, with researchers looking at possible relationships between emotional intelligence and academic or psychological outcomes.

Many people believe that emotional intelligence is crucial in both personal and professional settings. Our ability to control our behavior, navigate complex social settings, and make personal decisions that result in positive consequences are all impacted. Emotional intelligence has the capacity to continue to grow over time, in contrast to cognitive intelligence, which is consistently steady throughout life.

"A type of social intelligence that incorporates the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to distinguish among them, and to utilize this information to guide one's thoughts and behaviors" is how Salvoy and Meyers

originally described emotional intelligence (EI) in the early 1990s.General intelligence has been defined as an individual's overall ability to adapt through efficient cognition and information processing. Salvoy and Meyers broadened their definition to include "the verbal and non-verbal appraisal and expression of emotion, the regulation of emotion in the self and others, and the utilization of emotional content in problem-solving." To put it simply, emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, comprehend, and respond appropriately to emotional cues from others.

A person with strong emotional intelligence is more upbeat and pleasant in their work life, and they succeed in their careers by successfully collaborating with others.Individuals vary in their personality traits, desires, aspirations, and ways of expressing emotions. One of the most crucial psychological factors that shape a person's character is their emotional state, which significantly affects the longevity of both their personal and work relationships. Many individuals find it challenging to differentiate between Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Emotional Intelligence (EI). Just as those with high Intellience Quotient (IQ) scores are not guaranteed success in life, despite their intellectual capabilities, some individuals find it difficult to maintain their personal and professional relationships. Achieving success does not always come to those with elevated IQ scores. Consequently, individuals who possess emotional intelligence can recognize their potential and apply it effectively in their personal and professional endeavors.

Feeling is a crucial component of an individual‘s character and existence. In both personal and professional contexts, emotional intelligence is significantly essential. Emotions represent some of the most potent psychological states found in human personality. Through emotions, one can effectively express one's internal feelings. Emotions are a fundamental part of human nature as they drive behaviour and offer numerous opportunities for individuals to convey their inner feelings about their surroundings. The interplay of emotions and thoughts leads to feelings, making emotions powerful motivators that push us to take immediate action and solve problems quickly. They are essential in social contexts, as they aid in developing and improving both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication and relationships.

The current competitive landscape and educational environments emphasize student success based on reasoning abilities besides self-awareness, self-regulation, emotions, and intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. According to Samiari, emotional intelligence involves processing emotions, which includes assessing one's feelings and those of others to navigate society more effectively and successfully. Bar-On suggested that emotional intelligence encompasses non-cognitive and cognitive skills, traits, and competencies that impact an individual's ability to thrive personally and professionally. It also aids in adapting to one's environment, contributing to a harmonious and fulfilling life. In their research, Cooper and Sawaf defined emotional intelligence as the capacity to experience, comprehend, and effectively utilise various emotions as a foundation for human endeavours, knowledge, relationships, and influence on others. Mayer conducted a study examining emotional intelligence, enthusiasm, and attitudes. His findings indicated that individuals prefer to seek out positive feelings while attempting to evade negative ones. People often try to conceal or suppress their negative emotions. The capacity to manage emotions has a constructive impact on individuals, enhancing their personalities and enabling them to handle higher stress levels. Additionally, skills such as recognising and understanding emotions also indirectly enrich emotional experiences, assisting individuals in regulating themselves.

Hence Emotional intelligence can be described as an individual's capacity to comprehend and react to their own emotions and those of others, utilising this skill to influence their thoughts and behaviours. It is a crucial component of all interpersonal relationships. The 'emic' viewpoint of emotional intelligence enables people to recognise and manage their feelings and harness them for successful interactions with others. Meanwhile, the 'etic' perspective of EI allows individuals to connect with, empathise, and respond to the feelings of others. Both viewpoints are vital for achieving effective human communication.

Need for the study:
Social work requires significant emotional resilience, empathy, and practical interpersonal skills, all closely linked to emotional intelligence (EI). Students in social work programs are educated to interact with vulnerable groups, navigate complex emotions, and manage their emotional reactions in frequently stressful and ethically complicated situations. Emotional intelligence, which is defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilise emotions effectively within oneself and in others, is a crucial competency for professional practice. Nonetheless, despite its importance, EI is not always consistently incorporated into the social work education curriculum. By examining the levels and aspects of EI among social work students, educators can identify areas lacking in emotional competence and guide the development of focused training interventions. Consequently, this research is vital for fostering future practitioners who are more emotionally adept and capable of providing empathetic, ethical, and practical services.

Objective
This study aims to evaluate the emotional intelligence levels in social work students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants
The sample includes 250 individuals, 120 boys and 130 girls, primarily students, from Coimbatore city. The social work students' age range is between 19 and 22. The sampling technique used is convenience sampling.

Instruments
Personal Information Form: The researchers created a form to gather demographic information from the participants. This form includes various questions for gender, age, socioeconomic status, and educational background.

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, known as TEIQue, is a freely available tool designed to assess global trait emotional intelligence. Grounded in the Trait Emotional Intelligence Theory, the TEIQue plays a crucial role in emotional intelligence (EI) research. The TEIQue is available in both a long form and a short form. The TEIQUE-LF features a self-report format with 153 items divided across 15 subscales and takes approximately 25 minutes to complete. Conversely, the TEIQue-SF consists of a 30-item questionnaire. Participants rate the items on a 7-point scale.

Procedure
Data collection was conducted using an electronic format. A Google form, which included personal demographic information and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, was used for data gathering. This form was distributed among social work students.

Results

Table 1 Shows The Emotional Intelligence Among The Social Work Students.

Variable	N	Mean	Level of EI
Male	120	107.43	High level of emotional intelligence
Female	130	107.9	High level of emotional intelligence

Table 1 shows the emotional intelligence level of social work students whole sample. The mean value of the male and female are 107.43 and 107.9 respectively. The results interprets that the emotional intelligence of social work students are high. The emotional intelligence will help the students in many aspects, especially empathy and enable them to comprehend the marginalized community viewpoint and consider their emotional and psychological condition when making decisions.

CONCLUSION

Although emotional intelligence is potentially significant for social work practice, it remains largely absent from the field. While much has been written regarding emotions and reflective practices in social work, the full scope of emotions may not have been completely recognised, particularly at the organisational and educational levels.

Given the intricate nature of emotions, the emotional challenges faced in practice should be systematically addressed as an essential component of mandatory debriefing or counselling within organisations; this is particularly crucial in child welfare services due to the sensitive nature of the work, which often elicits strong emotions in clients, professionals, and researchers alike.

Disclosing personal thoughts about casework and preconceived notions regarding clients necessitates humility and insights gained through professional experience.

Adequate relational support is crucial to ensure that clients feel understood and empowered (Ruch, 2012) and should be prioritised when practitioners utilise themselves as a resource during client interactions (Johnson and Yanca, 2001).

Focusing on social work students , emotional intelligence is much more important as they tend to work with marginalized community’s.

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